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# THE GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP OF DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR BUILDINGS AND THEIR EQUIPMENT.

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ALTHOUGH the annual Congressional Public Buildings Bill is continually increasing, it is evident from numerous indications that the United States Government will soon adopt the policy of owning its diplomatic and consular buildings abroad, and the time is not far distant when travelling Americans will no longer be mortified at the sight of the United States Embassy or Legation being located on a single floor in an apartment-house or office building with a tin shield over the door, far inferior in appearance to that of many a butcher or baker in the vicinity.

In the early days of our history, when modesty in appearance was a necessary accompaniment of economy in expenditure, it was highly desirable that our rented establishments abroad should reflect the sterling principles of our forefathers; but as the years have gone by the very economy which we sought has become ridiculously distorted into the payment of annual rentals whose accumulation represents a sum which would have bought the buildings themselves over and over again, and still we have the buildings yet to buy. Meantime our country has grown to be one of the richest nations on the face of the earth and our representatives should be installed in a manner more worthy of the country they represent, for of all nations Americans abroad are most fond of frequenting their Embassies, Legations and Consulates.

There is, too, another aspect of this early simplicity idea which it is, perhaps, well not to lose sight of. In those days our weakness excited the sympathy of Continental Europe, and our repre-

sentative was Franklin, one of the most remarkable men of the day, one who could converse equally well with a man of science, a diplomat or a court lady; indeed, it was his popularity with the latter which gave him his enormous influence, for he was a new species of lion to exhibit in their salons. Court uniform was deemed absolutely necessary in those days, and when, after being well received in society, Franklin was officially presented at court it is said that his tailor did not bring home his uniform in time, and he had the nerve to go in simple habit and so made a great hit. He was quick to perceive this himself, and he thus laid the foundation of an honorable custom which has since become deservedly a matter of national pride. But we are no longer a weak nation, and instead of exciting sympathy it is fair to say that we excite an honest envy because we are not handicapped by the historic traditions of older people and our future is somewhat dreaded by Europe.

Now that the time for the buildings is arriving, however, it would seem that to make haste slowly is the part of wisdom, so that the structures to be erected may be in accordance with the best ideas of modern business requirements and typical of the most practical people of the present day. Judging from the discussions in Congress and the attitude of various newspapers, the idea seems to be quite prevalent in the United States that the main object of these new buildings is to afford our representatives the means of giving gorgeous receptions and handsome dinners, as though the dignity of the United States would be supported and the attainment of diplomatic objects be effected by display and through gastronomic attractions; but such is not the case. Time was, of course, when diplomacy meant intrigue and petticoat influence and subterranean methods generally; but that time has gone by, and it is extremely doubtful if in the last twenty years there has been a single instance where the official interests of the United States have been advanced in the slightest degree by any social entertainments whatever. Our representatives should not, by the smallness of their salaries, be put in a position such that they cannot suitably return the social civilities offered them; and, indeed, for many reasons an increase of salary is far more important than anything else that can be done for them; but that is another story. There does not at present seem to be much disposition, on the part of Congress, to increase the

pay of the diplomatic corps, although an English Ambassador receives \$40,000 per year with his house and entertaining expenses, while an American Ambassador receives only \$17,500 and nothing found. Under any circumstances, however, whether the Ambassador entertains foreigners or not, is no matter of national importance.

What should concern our people, however, is the fact that, while in Washington we have official buildings superior to those of any other country for the transaction of business, abroad we occupy quarters neither creditable to a first-class nation nor large enough for the purpose. We recognize at home that every Senator and Member and every leading official should have a large, airy, well-equipped office, but we fail to see that in foreign capitals we ought to take pride in showing that these same ideas are most conducive to the satisfactory discharge of public affairs even there. To buy a handsome building for an Ambassador or Minister to reside in and to relegate the offices to a mediocre flat or other makeshift would be to repeat officially the joke well known to all naval officers in Yokohama thirty years ago, where a missionary built a minute chapel and a large brick residence and then reported to the home society that he had erected a handsome church for the heathen and with the few remaining bricks had built himself an humble mansion.

Nor is it our policy to follow blindly in the footsteps of European nations and by erecting buildings similar to theirs repeat their defects. Generally speaking, these buildings consist of a handsome central body with two wings enclosing a court separated from the street by a wall having one or two huge gateways for the entry and exit of carriages. The Ambassador's residence and reception-rooms are in the body, the Embassy proper in one wing and the servants' quarters and stables in the other; but these buildings are mostly old and when erected were without modern conveniences and the enormous increase in Government business, the change from horse vehicles to automobiles, the much greater crowds to be handled at official functions owing to the facilities of modern travel, etc., make these buildings obsolete in spite of the continual alterations that are being made to them, and the stories that are added because they have no more ground space.

Poor nations like Japan may wisely buy and alter old buildings,

but we should start with a clean slate. Americans are beginning to realize that our geographical situation alone is absolutely certain to make us eventually the first nation in the world, both physically and financially, and that our preponderance in commercial affairs and the necessity for markets will demand our taking an interest in many world matters which our ancestors never dreamed of. Hence the desirability of establishing our representatives in the capitals of the world in a manner that is worthy of our great future and of doing it deliberately.

Briefly it would seem desirable, first, to send a commission of architects abroad to study the local conditions in each capital of the world. Then buy land—a whole block—in any healthy quarter, whether fashionable or not, for fashion will follow the flag. Plan the Embassy and Consulate General on a corner lot, with offices on one street and the ambassadorial residence on the other, with a tower at the point from the top of which the national flag may float on proper occasions, instead of being stuck out of a window like that of a ship in distress.\* Having an entrance on each street, an arriving and departing crowd, no matter how large, can be handled with facility; whereas with an entrance only on one street three-quarters of an hour for arrival must now be allowed in a line of carriages at an ordinary diplomatic reception and one hour and a quarter to get away after one has said good-by.

Two interior wings would be required for archives, library, visitor's reading-room, garage, etc., and ample space even beyond this should be allowed for future expansion. The increased value of the remainder of the block would in a short time pay for the investment. One advantage of this method of procedure would be that in most cases the plans could be submitted to Congress at the same time that an appropriation was asked for and they could be published in the newspapers. It is really surprising to see what a unanimous feeling there is on this subject of Government ownership among the Americans travelling abroad, and yet how little opportunity there is for any one to actually do anything about it in a manner which will reach the people whose money is to be spent for the purpose.

\* It is not advisable to have the residence of the Consul-General in this building. An increase of twenty per cent. in his salary for the specific purpose of house rent and the entertainment of American citizens would be much more practical.

The buildings, once erected, should be equipped with a complete staff of well-paid jointors, lift men, messengers, chauffeurs, etc. For this purpose United States colored men would be most uniformly satisfactory; they are typically American in appearance, they are loyal and they have an intuitive faculty for learning foreign languages by ear, which few people in the United States suspect. Besides, they always have a hearty welcome for American visitors, which cannot be said for many of the foreigners that we are forced to employ. In any event, "let none but Americans be on guard." During our war with Spain, when it was necessary to do a great deal of hard work at our Embassies, and when the entire sympathy of Continental Europe was against us, it was embarrassing to have people in our service whom we dared not trust and whose patriotism was not our patriotism.

There are two objections to the locating of buildings in the manner that I have suggested. The first is their exposure to mob attack in case of a popular demonstration, which was always carefully considered in planning the older Embassies, but the progress of civilization and the business advantages would, it is thought, counterbalance this defect nowadays. The second is the accessibility of the Ambassador, out of office hours, to persistent Americans who insist on seeing him whether he wants to be seen or not. This difficulty is one to which the representatives of other nations are not so much subject. No person, for example, who has not been presented at the English Court, would presume to besiege an English Ambassador for social attentions, tickets to official functions, etc.; but there are a few citizens of our country (where it is easier to be presented to the President than it is to see a doctor, because it costs nothing) to whom the idea that an Ambassador or his wife has any right to privacy is entirely wanting. Such people often think that they own the Embassy, and one could not do like the old admiral who in a similar case cut a chip out of the wooden deck and handed it to the intruder as he was assisted over the ship's side with the remark that he could take his share with him. The ancient Egyptians buried their kings at the end of a long dark tunnel in the side of a mountain. In the middle of the tunnel was a huge pit into which plunderers might fall. It must be confessed that this plan did not ultimately succeed, for no Egyptian king's tomb has been

found unrifled. Still, if such a tunnel connected the Ambassador's office and his residence it might kill a few of the more heedless.

The social side of a diplomat's duties is a thorny topic to discuss, but it is very important. His official duties can be regulated by cable, but not so his social duties. In the first place, few Americans understand that diplomats and their wives are not required by etiquette to return visits in person; a return by card is all that is required; but this is absolutely necessary, and there is no social crime that our representatives and their wives more often commit than to neglect this simple courtesy. It is largely due to the fact that there is no one at a United States Embassy or Legation whose specific duty it is to care for the cards, and oftentimes a second or third secretary, when the pressure is great, has to be diverted from his legitimate duties to attend to it. Many a diplomat has made a lifelong enemy of a man he never knew by thus slighting the latter or his wife. There should be a special secretary (preferably a lady) attached to an Embassy to attend to these social requirements. This part of the equipment may seem silly to plain Americans at home, but let them come abroad and be treated that way themselves once and see how long it will be before they will forget it; and silly or not silly, it is the social side of an American diplomat's existence which causes ninety per cent. of his diplomatic troubles.

I would go further and say that the Embassy should be equipped with minute printed instructions about matters of courtesy; something like we have in the navy regulations, for example. People new to diplomatic life cannot be expected to know these things, and many who do know will disregard them. Sometimes an Ambassador on leave will make a continued stay in the capital to which a colleague is accredited and never go near him. Sometimes an Ambassador's wife will pay no attention to commercial people on the ground that they belong to the Consul-General's wife, etc. Such things should not be permitted.

Naturally, people who expect social attentions usually bring letters of introduction, but even these get mislaid and lost, much to the chagrin of all concerned when it is discovered. In the old days in Japan, where the Legations of all countries were thrown much together because we were strangers in a strange land, special passports or letters of introduction were known by

the English name of soup-tickets, and a pleasant dinner, which we all attended, was considered to be the proper attention that should be paid to the bearer. But in Europe, where there are so many more travellers, the problem is not so simple. Suppose, for example, the diplomat's wife mixes up a variety of soup-ticket holders and invites them to meet each other at the same dinner. The chances are that they may all freeze the atmosphere, because at home they do not speak or because they had expected to meet foreign nobility. Suppose, however, that she has provided for this emergency, then the table may be disarranged in an unexpected manner. Once when I was detailed by the Ambassador's wife to take a charming young American girl out to dinner and was just polishing up my brains for conversational purposes, suddenly her mother engineered herself into the seat next me and navigated the daughter alongside a young nobleman much in demand in the matrimonial market. The hostess was much amused, and I was quite pleased, too, for the lady was very intelligent and, anyway, she is dead now.

Sometimes, too, weird people appear with special passports: people it would be awkward to invite any one to meet. I remember once in another capital— But perhaps I had better reserve that reminiscence for my memoirs. Then there were the ladies who wished to travel before coming to our capital and who sent all their heavy luggage to the Embassy direct from the steamer and were so very wroth when they arrived and found that it was in the custom-house, and the multitude of others who had their mail sent there, and the poor beggars of distressed Americans who used to turn up from time to time, not knowing that the United States is the only country that makes no provision for sending such people home. The Ambassador and his wife, and the Attachés and their wives, and the Consul-General and his wife, and the Consular Attachés and their wives, all have a financial knowledge of the distressed American that the good people at home wot not of.

But the real riddle for the diplomat's wife to solve is that of the American colony, of which she is or ought to be the social leader. This colony in the principal capitals of Europe consists of three classes: the wives of Americans in business, ladies educating their children and ladies of leisure. Now, what shall she do with these? Shall she class them or hash them? The riddle



is as bad as that of the Sphinx, but *Œdipus* finally solved that one and a few tactful ladies have solved this one; but with most ladies it is a choice between *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, and whatever plan they decide to pursue they regret it. Perhaps they may then turn exclusively to foreign society; but this only excites the contempt of the entire colony, as it ought to do, and the ridicule of the foreigners themselves.

All this goes to illustrate the trite saying that a circle is much more convex when viewed from the outside than it is when viewed from the inside, and those who imagine that the social life of a diplomat is a bed of roses are quite mistaken. The moral seems to be that the prudent diplomat will entertain whom he pleases, but in as quiet a manner as possible and never have his guest list published.

Our national holidays are, of course, exceptions. On these days all the American world, both travelling and local, should be welcomed with the most lavish hospitality, and the entire list should be published. No matter whether an American lives abroad or has been away from the United States only a week, he likes to tread American soil (and Embassies and Legations are American soil), and most Americans have the good sense to be quite satisfied with this amount of attention. Whether the ladies are in travelling, visiting or décolleté gowns, or the men in checked suits, frock coats or ulsters and goloshes, they all thoroughly enjoy themselves, and it is a pleasure to mingle with them. To a naval officer who has been long abroad, but is still an American, even "plain Jane with no trimmings" is an attractive object; but at any one of these receptions he will see more pretty girls to the square yard than any other nation can produce, and as General Porter once said to me enthusiastically at one of his receptions in Paris: "There is nothing like 'em."

NOTE.—Since the above article was written, a society has been formed among Americans in London for the purpose of agitating this question, which shows its increasing importance.

F. M. BARBER.